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SUBJECT: THE GAMBIA: TORTURE VICTIMS GO PUBLIC

REF: A. BANJUL 653

1B. BANJUL 664 ET AL (NOTAL)

ACCOUNTS OF TORTURE AT COURT MARTIAL HEARINGS

11. (SBU Ref a provides update on the status of detainees and trials, most related to the abortive coup plot here in March. As previously reported (e.g., ref b), we have picked up credible accounts of torture suffered by detainees. To our knowledge, the recent testimony by military officers charged with involvement in the failed coup plot marks the first time that detainees have gone public with claims of torture. ref a, the press reported that, at court martial proceedings in October, Captain Yaya Darboe denied involvement in the plot and asserted that he had confessed only after "severe torture." Judging from press reports, Darboe recounted the torture in some detail, for example, describing methods of beating (palm tree branches and metal cables). He reportedly described the torturers as hooded and wearing black uniforms, and said the ringleader identifed himself as "Hell Manager." Another military defendant, Lieutenant Pharing Sanyang, also claimed torture at the court martial hearings, according to press accounts.

COMMENT

12. (SBU) We had been doubtful that any of the detainees would go public with torture claims, given authorities' presumed warnings to victims that doing so would only result in further such abuse. And, it remains to be seen whether other detainees, military or civilian, will also come forward with public accounts of torture. Also noteworthy is the fact that, despite The Gambia's restrictive media environment — featuring, inter alia, authorities' harassment and intimidation of journalists — two privately owned newspapers, the "Point" and "Foroyaa," nonetheless reported the torture claims, with no discernible GOTG retaliation to date. That two military detainees have now publicly claimed torture provides us with additional ammunition in our approaches to the GOTG for action to address such abuses. END COMMENT.